

TV GUIDE

Nov. 4-10
40c

Priscilla Barnes:
the lady doth protest

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Far-out TV is here

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TV TELETYPE

CAROL BURNETT, who was thrown critical bouquets for her performance in ROBERT ALTMAN's "A Wedding," has been engaged by CBS to star with KEITH MICHELL ("Henry VIII") in "The Tenth Month," a TV-movie set for next season. Altman associate JOAN TEWKESBURY will direct the venture . . . JOHN RITTER (Three's Company) cuts his cinematic teeth in "Who Says Nice Guys Finish Last?"

DONNA REED returns to television after a 12-year absence to star with EFREM ZIMBALIST JR. (FBI) and HELEN HAYES in "The Best Place to Be," a four-hour miniseries coming up on NBC. She plays a recently widowed woman who must go to work to support her family . . . Meanwhile, on the other side of the employment picture, erstwhile Honeymooner ART CARNEY stars in "Letter from Frank," an impending CBS TV-movie about forced retirement.

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Canada's Television Magazine



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Nothing grows older faster in America than yesterday's technology. Conversely, nothing captures the North American fancy as readily as something new. Now, if that something new just happens to be something better, so much the grander.

I am about to describe the latest technology in home-television reception. It is not cable TV. Nor home videotape recorders. No, it is not pay or subscription television. *It is satellite television*; the latest "Gee Whiz—Look At That!" toy of the communications world.

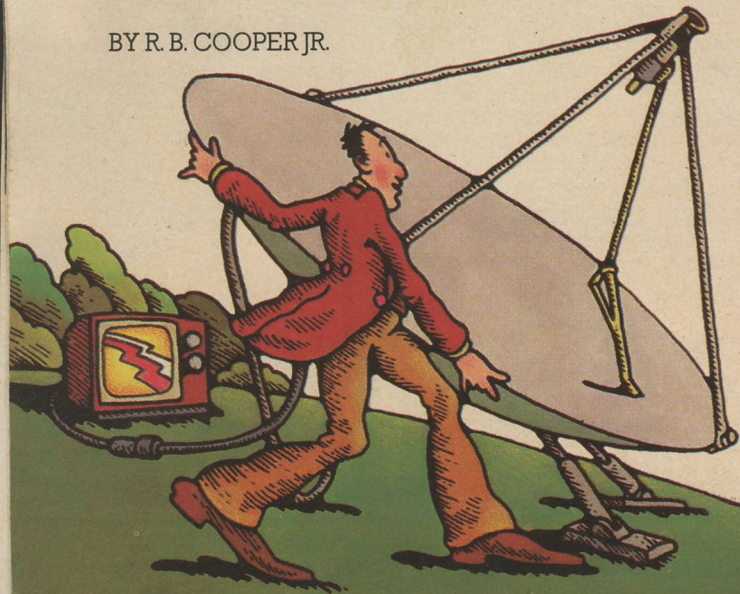
This is no science lesson, but bear with me for a few short sentences on satellite technology. There are today some 34 communication satellites worldwide, operating in a mode known as "geo-stationary orbit." This de-

scribes the satellite's position in space; some 22,300 miles directly above the equator, and its rate of forward speed. At that elevation and with just the right forward speed, the satellite appears to stand still to an observer on Earth. That's important because it allows you to point a special antenna at the spot in space occupied by the satellite and then walk away; confident that days or weeks or years later you can return and the special antenna will still be pointing at the satellite. If you should want to tune in another satellite, it takes only about 10 minutes to change the direction of the antenna, so with a minimum of effort, anyone in North America can pick up the signals of the four U.S. and three Canadian "birds."

PAY-TV WITHOUT PAYING?

Yes, all that and more—but first you have to build your own TV-satellite antenna

BY R. B. COOPER JR.

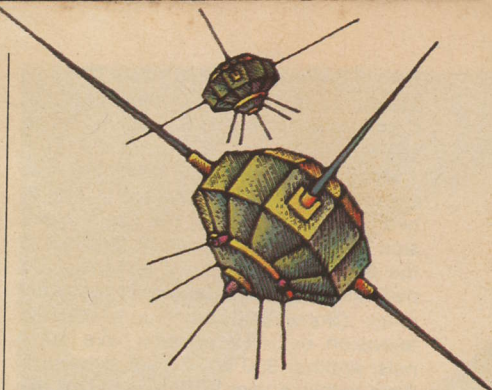


You have undoubtedly seen news films or photographs of satellite-tracking antennas. Huge saucer-shaped antennas resting on mountains of concrete and hundreds of tons of steel. You never gave serious thought to having one in your own backyard.

Well, think again. Technology has a way of scaling down equipment requirements and today in my backyard I, along with approximately 3000 others in the United States and Canada, have my own satellite-television terminal. Here is what having access to satellite-relayed television means to my family.

Program diversity. Those two words say it all. As this is written, my home-satellite terminal pulls in 36 different television-program channels. A listing of each would dull your mind; and you need to experience it in person to realize just what 36 channels, including three from Canada and one from Mexico City, can do to your viewing habits. In Oklahoma City, for example, we watch live soccer from Argentina, bullfights from Mexico and three CBC channels—two Northern Service in English and the French network. We have a selection of five "intended-for-cable-television" services (Home Box Office, Showtime, Fanfare and others) that run seven to 12 hours per day of first-run movies (long before they appear on regular TV, where they are gutted of non-G language and commercially impregnated), nightclub acts (Helen Reddy, Redd Foxx, Casino de Paris and hundreds more too numerous to mention) and special sporting events. There are three different 24 hour per day religious channels (PTL, CBN and Trinity). And there are more than 1000 hours per year of live sport-event coverage from Madison Square Garden, plus Notre Dame basketball. Then there is Atlanta's WTCG (the 24-hour sports-and-movie station now carried nationwide on cable); plus other great independents from Los Angeles (KTTV), Chicago (WGN-TV), San Francisco (KTVU) and New York (WOR-TV).

I once sat down with the program



schedules for the 36 satellite channels to tally the hours per week of sporting events and the number of movies in a single week's time. The score: 180 hours of sporting events and 247 movies. (My neighbors, with local TV, had 16 hours of sports and 23 movies.)

The reception quality of satellite signals will knock your eyes out. It is as good or better than your local stations see on their studio monitors. And sitting in your own living room watching movies such as "Saturday Night Fever," "Grease" and "Oh, God!" just as they were seen in theatres is like having a friend in Hollywood.

How do you get in on this? Back to the pseudo-science lesson for just a minute. *Satellite transmissions are not intended for home reception.* U.S. satellites are put into space by companies such as Western Union (Westar I and II) and RCA American Communications (Satcom I and II) as "common carriers for hire," contracting on a case-by-case basis to relay television programs from one point to another. The three Canadian satellites are under the control of Telesat Canada, owned half and half by the federal government and the telephone companies. They're used for telephone services as well as TV transmission, and so far only Telesat is authorized to own satellite terminals in Canada.

The federal Department of Communications is currently reviewing policy on private ownership of satellite earth stations and may eventually license →

private owners, including cable TV companies, as the Federal Communications Commission in the U.S. has for some years.

Most of the backyard terminals now operating in the U.S. got there by one of two routes. The first is the cable-television industry. At the present time, 10 of the 36 or so satellite TV channels are dedicated to cable-television program relay. (Some 700 community-antenna television, or CATV, systems have terminals; another 800 are expected to have them within a year.) Thus, many of the backyard private terminals have been purchased from the companies that sell professional terminals to cable systems. How much? When the first CATV system installed an Earth terminal in September of 1975, it paid more than \$100,000 for the installation. Today comparable terminals sell professionally for under \$20,000, installed.

An individual can get 36-channel reception in his backyard for around \$10,000; installed. Or there's the second route: if he is willing to do his own concrete work and put in 20 hours or so of erector-set construction, it will cost under \$6000.

Henry Howard of San Andreas, Cal., built his own terminal out of surplus radar parts for probably \$1500. Henry has an advantage most people don't have: he is a professor of electrical engineering at Stanford. Rod Wheeler of Whitehorse, Yukon, works for the local cable system. It, like the single, local television station, exists on week-old videotapes flown in from southern Canada. Wheeler decided to build a terminal for the Whitehorse cable system; only the Canadian government, unlike the American, doesn't allow cable systems in Canada to use satellite signals yet. Undaunted, Wheeler turned his terminal on, July 1, 1977, knowing full well that government bureaucrats had a five-day holiday ahead. He calculated that by the time they got back in gear July 5, he'd have public sentiment on his side.

Wheeler reckoned right about the

public. He received 8000 letters and telegrams, many from Vancouver and elsewhere in B.C., where people supported the project even though they hadn't been close enough to see the illicit shows. But he was wrong about the persuasive stroke of Canadian law. So Whitehorse had five days of "live television," and when it was all over Wheeler dragged his 15-foot satellite antenna to his home. Now, when it is 50 below zero and there is 12 feet of snow outside, Wheeler pulls up a bearskin rug before his color receiver and inside his 30-by-30-foot log cabin watches Missouri Valley basketball on the satellite, while Whitehorse watches week-old Canadian programs on cable.

North America has no corner on home-satellite reception. The Japanese have a new experimental satellite in operation and prototype \$500! home terminals being tested in rural Japan and Okinawa. A pair of Indonesian satellites are relaying native programming, plus Filipino television and Singapore (in English) television under contract. Hundreds of "private" terminals are going into the Pacific basin. In England a BBC engineer named Steve Birkill has his own eight-foot terminal on England's north-eastern coast in Sheffield. Birkill is one of those "build-it-all-myself" guys, and his satellite reception includes around a dozen channels from Moscow (via a Russian satellite), Spain, Argentina, Brazil and numerous African and Middle Eastern countries. Birkill has less than \$1000 invested, and probably a 1000 hours of his own time.

If you are not a Henry Howard or a Rod Wheeler or a Steve Birkill, and you decide you want a backyard satellite terminal, where do you go? Good question. My best suggestion is that you visit a nearby cable-TV system and ask them to show you copies of some of the CATV trade journals that are these days filled with advertisements and articles detailing Earth terminal systems. Can you not walk into a Radio Shack and buy a terminal? Not yet, and probably not for sev-

eral years to come.

But the size and cost of equipment are already beginning to drop. My 20-foot-diameter antenna is something of a dinosaur compared to a smaller, lighter six-foot model I installed recently.

Rod Wheeler says he's ready to go into production of Earth stations within a year, if he can get approval from the Department of Communications and the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

"The mining and lumber camps in the North would buy them for starters. Decent TV reception helps attract people to work in this part of the country and helps keep them happy once they're here.

"We'll be able to produce terminals with a 12-foot dish for about \$15,000," he says. "They'll be designed and built in the Yukon, and we figure we can turn out one a week.

"They'd have to be tuned to the Canadian satellites until the government decides what its policy is going to be, but they'll be capable of pulling in all 36 available channels."

If you find yourself fascinated by the prospect of satellite TV, there are a few things you should know. First, there is a distinct danger of addiction. Second, if you don't already own a home videotape recorder, you'll immediately want one when you get a satellite service. Third, be prepared for some . . . well, *unusual* television. The Johnny Carson show, for instance, is done "live" in Burbank at about 5 P.M. Pacific Standard Time. The show goes live via satellite to New York, where it is edited and taped for network play later. The live version on satellite is typically sent without "bleeps" or ads; during commercial breaks the mikes and cameras continue to run. We call this version "R-rated Carson."

One final word of advice. You may want to do what a West Texas rancher did. He placed his 10-foot satellite antenna under a geodesic dome. To protect it? Heck no, they can take Yukon winters in stride. He wanted to *hide* it.



Cooper and his 20-foot backyard antenna

His introduction to satellite TV was through a friend in the Dallas area. The friend hadn't had a night at home alone since he installed his terminal. It seems that when word gets around that you have one, everyone you ever met is a bosom buddy. The Cooper family solved that problem; we moved far into the country and now, when some cowboy wanders down our dirt road looking for directions back to civilization, we never mention satellite television. "Oh that?" we respond to questions about our antenna. "Just some government space-tracking station." (END)

R. B. Cooper Jr. is editor-in-chief of CATJ, a cable-television trade magazine published in Oklahoma City